

Moscow Worries About Effect of Nationalist Tensions on Army

By ROBERT PEAR
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 27 — The crackdown on military deserters in Lithuania reflects growing Soviet concern over the cohesion of the Soviet Army in the face of ethnic tensions and draft evasion in several non-Russian republics, American officials and military experts said today.

Such sentiments came to light as early as December, when the Soviet Defense Minister, Gen. Dmitri T. Yazov, voiced concern about anti-military sentiment in an interview in Pravda, the Communist Party daily. "One cannot help seeing, and I say this with bitterness, that recently anti-army manifestations have become more frequent in a number of regions," he said. He cited not only the Baltic republics, but also Soviet Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldavia, the Ukraine and some of the Central Asian republics.

Anti-Draft Demonstrations

In each of those republics, local newspapers have reported protests and demonstrations against the call-up of men into the Soviet Army.

General Yazov was even more blunt in an interview published on March 12 in the Government newspaper Izvestia.

"In the Baltic and Transcaucasian republics, in Moldavia and in some parts of the Ukraine," he said, "a number of informal organizations and nationalist, extremist groups are trying

The Defense Minister bitterly criticizes anti-army protesters.

to obstruct and, if they can, wreck the draft. They are inciting young people to refuse to serve, to desert and to destroy military registration documents. The anti-army actions are accompanied by threats of physical violence and abuse against servicemen and military commissariat staff."

"Last fall more than 66,500 people dodged the draft in the country as a whole," General Yazov said.

Russians account for the vast majority of Soviet Army officers, but only 43 percent of the 2.2 million 18-year-old Soviet men subject to conscription. Mark N. Kramer, an expert on Soviet military affairs at the Russian Research Center of Harvard University, said that men from the non-Russian republics accounted for more than half the conscripts.

He and other experts said that concern for the viability and cohesion of the Soviet Army was a factor in the latest moves by President Mikhail S. Gorbachev. In the first violent action since Lithuania proclaimed itself a sovereign state on March 11, Soviet soldiers stormed two hospitals in Lithuania today and seized at least 23 army deserters.

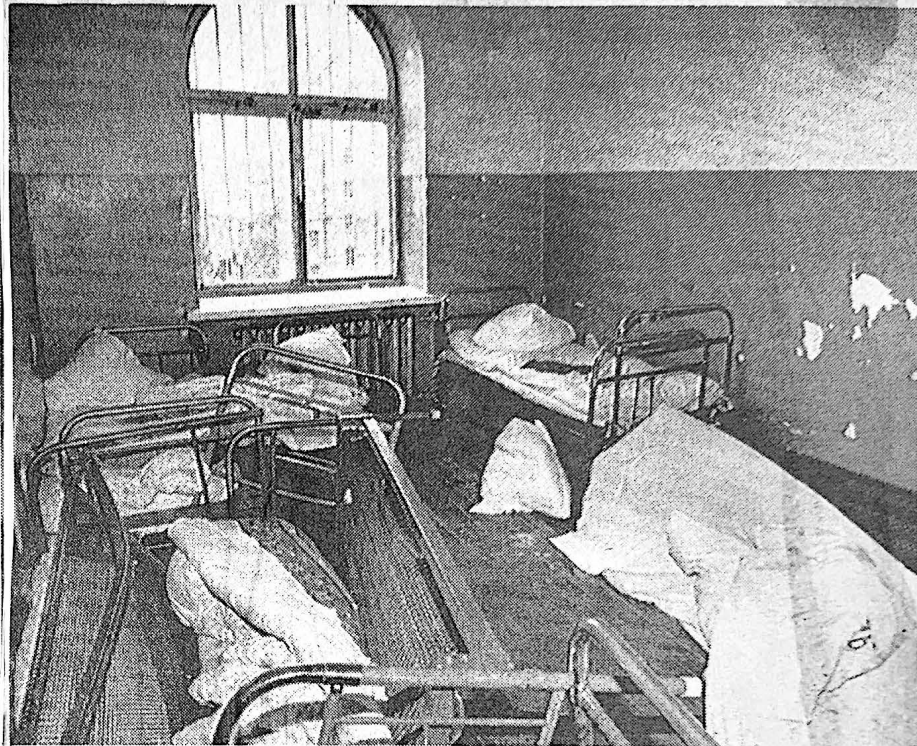
Mr. Kramer said the Soviet Army had been "almost vitriolic in criticism of Baltic nationalist movements" resisting Soviet rule.

The Soviet armed forces are based on the principle of universal military service. In general, Soviet soldiers have not been allowed to serve in their native regions, but instead have been stationed in geographically distant and ethnically different areas.

This "extraterritorial policy" has become increasingly unpopular. Many residents of the Baltic republics have demanded that they serve only in the Baltic military district. In a concession, the Defense Ministry announced in November that 25 percent of young men from the Baltic republics would be allowed to serve in that district. Others still must serve outside the region.

Murray Feshbach, a professor of demography at Georgetown University, said there were "all sorts of horror stories about interethnic tension" between Russians and soldiers from the Baltic republics. The stories, some of which have been recounted in the Soviet press, include many accounts of hazing and several reports of homosexual rape.

Residents of the Baltic republics have cited such reports as a reason for resisting military service. In November, the newspaper Sovetskaya Rossiya reported, "Not a day goes by without the headquarters of the Baltic mili-



Overturned beds at a psychiatric hospital in Vilnius after raid Tuesday by Soviet paratroopers in search of deserters. About half of the 39 deserters the Lithuanian government sheltered there were reported captured.

Associated Press

U.S. Praises Poland's Plans To Fly Soviet Jews to Israel

WASHINGTON, March 27 (Reuters) — The United States praised Poland today for agreeing to fly Soviet Jews to Israel and deplored the decision of the Hungarian airline, Malev, to stop flights in the face of threats of terrorism.

"We deplore the terrorist threats which have led to these decisions. We believe a more appropriate course of action would be to provide the required levels of security," said the State Department spokeswoman, Margaret D. Tutwiler.

Malev announced last week it was stopping the flights, which have carried thousands of Soviet Jews to Israel in recent months, because of threats by a pro-Iranian group based in Lebanon, the Islamic Holy War for the Liberation of Palestine.

Poland offered Monday to increase its flights to Israel to accommodate Soviet Jewish emigrants, and the Israelis have also pledged to find alternative routes. Miss Tutwiler said: "We regard as outrageous the efforts by terrorists to threaten or disrupt the flights of Soviet Jews going to Israel. We are very pleased to see that Poland is willing to act as a transit point. They are acting very responsibly, and we hope that others will as well."

Draft evasion is on the rise in several republics.

tary district receiving a report of yet another attempt to prevent young Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians from entering the ranks of defenders of the homeland."

A Complaint From Armenia

In September, the Armenian legislature adopted a resolution demanding that Soviet national authorities guarantee the safety of Armenian servicemen, in view of "numerous instances of the murder, persecution and beating of servicemen of the Armenian nationality" in the Soviet Army.

The military newspaper Krasnaya Zvezda reported in November that "a noisy group of young men" had held demonstrations outside the headquarters of the Armenian Communist Party and staged protests under the slogan, "Not one soldier for the occupation army."

Another issue of the same newspaper reported a similar demonstration in front of Government House in Tbilisi, the capital of Soviet Georgia. "Banners denounce the Soviet Army as an 'occupation force,'" it said. "Some of the protesters are demanding that they be allowed to do their military service solely within the Georgian Republic, while others do not want to serve in the army at all. Among the protesters are some conscripted soldiers who have left their units without authorization."

A Soviet Army captain, writing in Krasnaya Zvezda in November, said, "There are more and more instances in which soldiers called up from Armenia are leaving their units without authorization, citing unhealthy relations between nationalities."

Pride in Internationalism

General Yazov said that protesters in the Baltic republics had gone so far as to burn Soviet Army uniforms and destroy monuments honoring Soviet military heroes. In the Lithuania city of Kaunas, he said, "a tank that had been set up in honor of the Soviet soldier-liberators was taken down from its pedestal."

Such protests are profoundly unsettling to an army that has prided itself on being "a school of internationalism," promoting harmony among the nationalities of the Soviet Union.

Draft evasion is a crime under Soviet law, but the military authorities depend on local law-enforcement agencies to prosecute, and local officials have been reluctant to take action against members of their own nationality.

Gen. Norat Ter-Grigoryants, deputy chief of staff of the Soviet ground forces, complained recently that local authorities refused to prosecute people boycotting the draft in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. A military newspaper in the Ukraine made a similar complaint about the police there.

Mr. Kramer of Harvard said that "Lithuania itself is not of indispensable military importance." But he added: "If Lithuania secedes and is followed by other Baltic states, you get to more important military facilities. There is a huge air base in Tallinn, Estonia, and a gigantic naval base in the area of Riga, Latvia, the headquarters of the Baltic military district."